# THE IRANIAN NUCLEAR ISSUE AND INFORMAL NETWORKS

Abbas William Samii

ran's policies," secretary of state—designate Condoleezza Rice said during her January 2005 confirmation hearing, "are about 180 degrees antithetical to our own interests at this point." Rice mentioned Iran's nuclear pursuits as a specific area of concern. Arguably, trying to bomb Iran into a stance more in line with our own will not work, and Tehran has repeatedly refused to enter into direct public negotiations with Washington on this or other subjects. Iranian officials have traditionally said that they require a nuclear capacity because the country's oil resources are finite. They insist that they want to use nuclear energy for elec-

Abbas William Samii is the regional analysis coordinator for Southwest Asia and the Middle East with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, where he prepares a weekly analysis of events in and pertaining to Iran, the RFE/RL Iran Report (www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report). The views expressed in this article do not reflect the policies or position of RFE/RL. Dr. Samii, who was an infantryman/ parachutist in the U.S. Army, earned his PhD and MPhil at the University of Cambridge and a BA at American University. He has been a Bernard M. Osher Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and was, in 1997, Fulbright Professor and dean of academic affairs at the Institute of Public Administration in Tbilisi, Georgia. He is the author of numerous scholarly articles, contributions to edited collections, reviews, and newspaper articles. Dr. Caroline Ziemke recommended this subject to the author, and Drs. Daniel Byman and Farideh Farhi made very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article, but any errors are the author's responsibility.

tricity generation to maximize oil exports and increase hard currency earnings. An additional issue is national pride—some Iranian commentators declare that nuclear power is a right. The country has developed its nuclear capabilities independently, they argue, and Western (and specifically American) concerns about the issue mask an effort to delay Iran's development. Washington believes Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapons capability as well; Iranian officials deny this vehemently. In any case, the ultimate objective of Iranian nuclear pursuits—weapons or energy—is not the focus of this article. The assumption here is that possession of any nuclear capability by Iran is undesirable.

This article offers social network analysis as a potential solution to the problem of a nuclear Iran. Political scientists use this methodology to understand

relationships between individuals and organizations; it has been applied in the business world and in counterterrorism to identify key actors and predict their future actions and positions. Use of this methodology by the U.S. Army—creating "link diagrams" of blood and tribal relations—resulted in the capture of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein.

There exists in Iran a set of informal networks that are in important ways more influential than the formal policy-making structure. This system of networks includes quasi-official and state-affiliated institutions that are not legally identified but answer only to the country's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Less structured networks in Iran are based on religious status and education, political affiliation, kinship, military service, and wealth. This article represents an effort to identify these networks, examines the factors that hold them together, and briefly discusses, for contextual reasons, their historical backgrounds.2

The ability of informal networks to influence Iran's apparently small and restricted nuclear policy elite is unclear. However, the dangers of a nuclear Iran would be too great to ignore or dismiss this approach. This article therefore highlights members of the country's policy elite and their positions on the nuclear issue in the hope that this knowledge may provide a means by which the United States can persuade Iran to change its seemingly intractable stance. Short of that ideal, analysis of social networks sheds light on how outsiders can get information about, understand, and influence Iranian politics.

# INFORMAL NETWORKS IN IRAN

Personal networks tend to bypass formal institutions when a country's bureaucracies are weak or undeveloped, or when professional advancement depends on personal connections more than competence. In such an environment the networks provide mutual support, strengthen one's ability to respond to threats, reduce risk to the individual, and serve as communications mechanisms. The negative aspects of such networks include the fostering of conflicting loyalties, resistance to change, and the development of group thinking.

Identification of the actors ("nodes") and the relationships between them ("links") in current Iranian networks is difficult, because Western entree to Iran is restricted and work by Iranian scholars on this subject is limited. The modernization efforts of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1941-79) provided observers with much better access. During that period, furthermore, the administrative system was more vertical than it is now; this made identification and analysis of communication patterns slightly easier. Nevertheless, many of the observations about interpersonal and intragovernmental activities during the Pahlavi era continue to hold true.

A Western scholar who assisted in the establishment of the Institute of Administrative Affairs at the University of Tehran wrote in 1959, "[Iranians] are widely known for their friendliness and hospitality, but a vicious competition exists in many interpersonal relationships and is especially noticeable in the public service. A highly centralized, complex government bureaucracy serves a loose, individualistic society. And, although centralization is often extreme, co-

The role of ideology in any policy debate is unpredictable. This uncertainty goes some way toward explaining the seeming irrationality of the Iranian government's actions.

ordination is rare."3 Officials did not feel secure in their jobs, so they circumvented normal government procedures. "Family and personal influence have come to be so important that there is a

common feeling that nothing can be accomplished through regular channels." Indeed, the regular administrative channels tended to be slow and cumbersome.

Given the weaknesses of the formal apparatus, it was natural that Iranians found informal means to get things done. One of them was the dowreh (circle), an institution in which upper- and middle-class Iranians met to discuss and act on issues of common interest.<sup>5</sup> A dowreh usually met once a week, but politically active Iranians sometimes belonged to three or four of them. Each one was limited to between twelve and sixteen people, but shared memberships meant that information would spread more broadly. It could be an effective way to communicate in a country with weak news media: "If required, political opinions or gossip can be transmitted from a Shimran [northern Tehran] dowreh to the mosques, caravansaries, workshops, and teahouses in the remotest corners of the South Tehran bazaar within hours and to the other cities of Iran or countries outside of Iran within a day or two."6

The dowreh system was not confined to the middle and upper classes. A dowreh network encompassing bazaar, maktab (religious school), zurkhaneh (a traditional "house of strength," in which athletes lift weighted clubs and other apparatus and perform choreographed movements to the accompaniment of drums and poetic chanting), hozeh-yi elmieh (religious lecture hall), and similar institutions also existed. Individuals who passed information from one dowreh to another would gain a degree of influence that might be disproportionate to their official status.

One longtime Western scholar of Iran who has done extensive work on informal networks referred (at a time when Iran was still a monarchy) to a system "multi-layered and honey-combed with complex networks of informal groups." This system included "secret societies, religious brotherhoods, political cliques, coffee and tea house meetings, royal khalvats, ritualistic religious dastes, meetings of extended families, government anjoman, and bureaucratic factions and fraktions." The king was the center of numerous informal networks and surrounded himself with confidants who served as channels of access. These confidants could be military officers, cabinet members, family members, or old friends; they, in turn, had their own networks. Indeed, one of the reasons why studying these networks is difficult is that—now, as well as in the days of the shah—"in the politics of informality, those individuals who are most hidden from the public eye tend to be the most effective carriers of demands and information."

Decision making under the monarchy had fewer democratic pretensions than its current counterpart. The king presided over meetings that dealt with a range of subjects, from defense policy to oil prices to wages for textile workers. Because he did not trust his subordinates and sought to protect his throne, he had a highly centralized and unintegrated administrative hierarchy.<sup>10</sup>

# **Institutionalized Informality**

One man, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, dominated the governmental apparatus that succeeded the monarchy. He and his followers purged potentially disloyal officials and military officers, then created competing bureaucracies. Khomeini served as the ultimate arbiter when political disputes were insurmountable. An eight-year war with Iraq and the subsequent rebuilding of the country in the 1990s emphasized the need to create more streamlined and efficient decision-making and policy-implementing institutions. Although bureaucratization and further institutionalization did occur, the competition and rivalries continued. Furthermore, Khomeini's successor as Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, does not have the same revolutionary or religious credibility and would therefore find it more difficult to settle such disputes. Accordingly, Khamenei bypasses normal bureaucratic means of transmitting information by means of a system of special advisers and "Leader's Representatives" radiating from the Office of the Supreme Leader.

The Office of the Supreme Leader, headed by Hojatoleslam Mohammad Mohammadi-Golpayegani, has a number of special advisers. They include the former secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Hojatoleslam Hassan Rohani (who was succeeded by Ali Larijani, a previous Supreme Leader's Representative on the council); former foreign minister Ali-Akbar Velayati, now an international affairs adviser; and former speakers of Parliament Hojatoleslam Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nuri and Hojatoleslam Mehdi Karrubi. Roughly six hundred people are connected in this way with or are employed by the Office of the Supreme Leader.

A Leader's Representative is assigned to each governmental ministry, of which there are twenty-one, as well as to all military and security institutions. These individuals effectively serve as "clerical commissars," and although their function is not specified in the constitution, they were at one point more powerful than ministers and other officials, intervening wherever they wanted. 12 The heads of the parastatal foundations (described below), many of which are significant economic entities, are also Leader's Representatives. Finally, each of the country's provinces has an appointed Supreme Leader's Representative, as well as a governor-general appointed by the Interior Ministry.

One of the means by which leadership views are conveyed informally to the country's clerics, and from them to the population at large, is the Friday Prayer sermon.<sup>13</sup> The Friday Prayer leader in Tehran is the Supreme Leader himself; his substitutes include the Expediency Council chairman and another member of the council, the Assembly of Experts speaker (who preaches in Qom), and the Guardians Council secretary (all of these governmental bodies are discussed below). Most members of the Central Council of Friday Prayer Leaders, which meets annually, are appointed by the Office of the Supreme Leader. The content of the weekly sermon is determined in Tehran by the ten-member executive board of the Central Secretariat of the Central Council of Friday Prayer Leaders. There is some latitude for local variations but not for broad departures from the central directives. The Tehran and Qom sermons are transmitted by state radio and television, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB, also known as the Voice and Vision of the Islamic Republic).

Two other types of entities—foundations and think tanks—also function in this system of quasi-official networks. The foundations (bonyad, in Persian) started out as Islamic charities that took over assets confiscated from wealthy Iranians and the Pahlavi Foundation after the revolution. <sup>14</sup> Today they reportedly account for 10-20 percent of gross domestic product and have built up domestic constituencies by providing housing, hospitals, and other services for the poor. The head of each foundation, as we have seen, is also the Supreme Leader's Representative to that institution.

The biggest of these entities is the Oppressed and Disabled Foundation (Bonyad-i Mostazafan va Janbazan), which reportedly has assets worth more than ten billion dollars. 15 It owns hotels, a shipping line, petrochemical producers, and a great deal of real estate. The head of the Oppressed and Disabled Foundation until 1999 was Mohsen Rafiqdust, who had served as Ayatollah Khomeini's bodyguard and then directed the Revolutionary Guards Ministry (which existed from 1982 until 1989). He currently heads the Noor Foundation, which imports pharmaceuticals, sugar, and construction materials and owns real estate. 16 He also serves on the Expediency Council.

The present leader of the Oppressed and Disabled Foundation is Mohammad Foruzandeh. Born in 1953, Foruzandeh studied at Tehran Teachers' Training College until his expulsion for antiregime activities. After the Islamic Revolution, he served as governor-general of Khuzestan Province. In 1986, Foruzandeh served as chief of staff of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), a military created in parallel to the regular armed forces, and in 1993 he was appointed defense minister by then-president Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani.

The Imam Reza Shrine Foundation (*Astan-i Qods-i Razavi*), based in the northeastern city of Mashhad, also is noteworthy. Over the last twenty-five years the foundation's focus has shifted from the pilgrimage traffic to auto plants, agricultural businesses, and many other enterprises. It is worth an estimated fifteen billion dollars. The head of the foundation, Ayatollah Abbas Vaez-Tabasi, is a member of the Expediency Council and the Assembly of Experts.

In contrast, the role of think tanks in the system of quasi-official networks appears to be a fairly minor one. They can provide employment for an individual's clients, get patrons' ideas into the public arena, and conduct research on important policy issues. One such think tank is the Center for Strategic Research, which was subordinate to the Office of the President and is now the research arm of the Expediency Council; another is the Iranian Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), which is part of the Foreign Ministry. A think tank's ability to influence policy is based on its connection with a powerful individual, but such influence appears to be wielded only intermittently. For example, Hashemi-Rafsanjani's advocacy of a public referendum on Iran-U.S. relations in the quarterly journal of the Center for Strategic Research prompted a reaction by President Khatami and intense discussion by the media. The political stir, however, had more to do with Hashemi's comments than with the institution responsible for the journal. Other publications from the Center for Strategic Research have not elicited such reactions.

## Traditional Bases of Networks

Aside from the quasi-official links discussed above, personal networks in Iran are based on several factors—religious status and education, political affiliation, kinship, military service, and wealth. As will be seen below, it is difficult to distinguish one factor from another or to specify which factor is dominant in a network.

There is no precise figure on the number of clerics in Iran. Fifteen years ago, estimates ranged from ninety thousand (from media observers), to two hundred thousand (from Iranian clerics themselves), to three hundred thousand (from European sources). Another fifty or sixty thousand Iranians had some religious

training. There were about forty thousand theology students at Iranian seminaries. There also were some sixty thousand people with no formal training or qualifications who acted as urban preachers, rural prayer leaders, and procession organizers. Reportedly, thousands continue to receive training at religious institutions in Isfahan, Tehran, and other cities.<sup>20</sup> In particular, theologically inclined individuals train in the major Shia cities of Qom and Mashhad, where they have gone on to work. There are almost sixty seminaries in Qom, the most prominent of which are Fayzieh, Dar ul-Shafa, Hojjatieh, Sayteh, and Golpayegani. Mashhad is the site of the tomb of Imam Reza (AD 765-817 or 766-818) and some twenty seminaries, including Khairat Khan, Mirza Jafar, and Navvah. There are also seminaries in Isfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, Tehran, and Yazd. Other major Shia centers are in the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala and in the Baghdad neighborhood of Khazimiyah.

The shared educational experience of Shia clerics inculcates them with tactics for management and political survival.<sup>21</sup> These include razdari (secrecy, meaning specifically that a clergyman should not reveal true information about the inner workings of the clergy) and taqiyeh (dissimulation, which justifies a cleric in acting in any manner or saying anything necessary to mislead strangers about his own true beliefs or intentions). Also important is the Islamic principle of maslehat—acting for the common or social good, or doing something because it is expedient given the current circumstances.

The system of networks produced by this common professional and educational background, combined with the postrevolutionary politicization of the Qom theological institutions, is a convoluted one. One finds right-wing clerics

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connected with the Qom Theological Lecturers Association (Jameh-yi Mudarissin-i Hozeh-yi Elmieh-yi Qom) and leftist ones connected with the Qom Theological Seminaries (Hozeh-yi Elmieh-yi Qom).22 The Society of

Islamic Scholars of Qom (Majma-yi Talab va Fuzalla-yi Qom), established before the Islamic Revolution as a sort of trade union to support clerics financially, became politicized and now is linked with the Islamic Iran Developers Coalition (Etelaf-i Abadgaran-i Iran-i Islami), which dominates the legislature. The parliamentary representative from Qom, Hojatoleslam Ali Banai, heads this entity. Less powerful are the reformist clerical bodies—the Society of Teachers and Reformers of the Qom Islamic Theological Center (Majma-yi Mudarissin va Mohaqeqin-i Hozeh-yi Elmieh-yi Qom) and the Society of the Islamic Students Following the Line of the Imam (Majma-yi Talab-i Khat-i Imam).

The case of the Haqqani religious school illustrates how a network based on religious connections operates. Haqqani lecturers are associated with other seminaries, religious research institutions, and publishing houses; Haqqani alumni are active in the judiciary, the IRGC, and until a few years ago in the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS).<sup>23</sup> The MOIS was allegedly purged of such individuals amid allegations that they had become rogue elements responsible for the murders of dissidents and intellectuals.<sup>24</sup> The former MOIS personnel went on to create what are referred to as "parallel" intelligence and security institutions, some within government organizations and others without state affiliations.<sup>25</sup> A parliamentarian has claimed that the people purged from the MOIS continued and expanded their activities in such cells: "The intelligence apparatus of one of these organs in Tehran has three times the number of personnel that the MOIS has throughout the country."

The Haqqani seminary network is involved in the administration of Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who won the Iranian presidential election in June 2005. Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, a prominent hard-line cleric who served on the seminary's board of directors and is still associated with it, endorsed Ahmadinejad's candidacy.<sup>27</sup> Grand Ayatollah Haeri-Shirazi, the Supreme Leader's Representative in Fars Province, has said that some of Ahmadinejad's supporters were his students at the Haqqani seminary.<sup>28</sup> Two Haqqani alumni serve in Ahmadinejad's cabinet—Hojatoleslam Gholam Hussein Mohseni-Ejei as Minister of Intelligence and Security, and Hojatoleslam Mustafa Purmohammadi as Minister of the Interior.

Many politically active clerics are linked through membership in either of two of the country's main political entities, the older and more conservative Tehran Militant Clergy Association (Jameh-yi Ruhaniyat-i Mobarez-i Tehran) and the pro-reform Militant Clerics Association (Majma-yi Ruhaniyun-i Mobarez), which emerged in 1988.<sup>29</sup>

Top clerics come from similar family backgrounds.<sup>30</sup> In some cases the kinship links are fairly straightforward. The sons of the prominent apolitical cleric Ayatollah Mirza Hashem Amoli, who are known by the surname "Larijani," are a case in point.<sup>31</sup> Currently, Ali Ardeshir-Larijani is secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Mohammad Javad Ardeshir-Larijani is an adviser to the judiciary chief, and Hojatoleslam Sadeq Ardeshir-Larijani serves on the Guardians Council. Positions held by the brothers in the past include head of state radio and television, Islamic culture and guidance minister, political officer in the Revolutionary Guards Ministry, deputy foreign minister, parliamentarian, founder of the parliamentary research center, adviser to the Supreme Leader, and presidential adviser.

In other cases the family connections seem counterintuitive. Ayatollah Yusef Jannati-Sanei and Ayatollah Hassan Jannati-Sanei are brothers, but they are at opposite ends of the political spectrum. Hassan heads the Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation, which is offering a multimillion-dollar bounty for the head of British author Salman Rushdie, whose Satanic Verses allegedly insults the prophet Mohammad. Hassan also serves on the Expediency Council. Yusef, on the other hand, one of the country's most respected clerics, is fairly apolitical, although he has spoken out against the house arrest in 1997 of the dissident Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri and other hard-line excesses.<sup>32</sup>

Another set of brothers further illustrates this point. Hojatoleslam Mohammad Mojtahed-Shabestari is a theology professor at Tehran University who has spoken against religious conservatism and advocates women's rights, while Ayatollah Mohsen Mojtahed-Shabestari is a Tabriz Friday Prayer leader, a member of the Assembly of Experts, and formerly a conservative parliamentarian representing Tabriz. The third brother, Ali Ashraf Mojtahed-Shabestari, served as ambassador to Tajikistan, ambassador and assistant to the Permanent Representative Office of Iran at the Geneva office of the United Nations, head of the Foreign Ministry's Finance Department, and head of the Center for Political Studies' International Department.<sup>33</sup>

A common military or revolutionary experience also can serve as the basis for a network. Many members of the Islamic Iran Developers Coalition (Etelaf-i Abadgaran-i Iran-i Islami), which dominated the municipal council elections in February 2003 and parliamentary polls in February 2004, once served in the IRGC and now allegedly maintain their contacts with the corps.<sup>34</sup> Ten of the top thirty finishers in the race for parliamentary seats representing the capital city served in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88).<sup>35</sup> They include Imad Afrugh, Davud Danesh-Jafari, Hussein Fadai, Zaynab Kadkhoda, Hamid Reza Katouzian, Mehdi Kuchakzadeh, Hussein Muzaffar, Seyyed Ali Riaz, Parviz Soruri, and Ali Reza Zakani. Eleven of the top thirty were involved with Syrian, Lebanese, or Palestinian revolutionary activities, were imprisoned by the previous regime, or were otherwise involved in opposition activities. This group includes Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel, Ahmad Tavakoli, Seyyed Mehdi Tabatabai-Shirazi, Muzaffar, Afrugh, Danesh-Jafari, Seyyed Fazlollah Musavi, Hussein Nejabat, Hussein Sheikholeslam, Hojatoleslam Abbas Ali Akhtari, and Fadai. One reformist newspaper estimates that some ninety members of parliament have a "background in revolutionary and military institutions," although this is rather vague.<sup>36</sup>

Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who won the Iranian presidential election in June 2005, has a similar background and appears to have benefited from the resulting connections. Ahmadinejad served in the IRGC in the 1980s and subsequently served in provincial government positions. But he was a relative unknown until April—May 2003, when the Tehran municipal council selected him as the capital's mayor. His relationship with the Islamic Iran Developers Coalition is not clear (he has been described as a founding member), but he acknowledges being a leading member of another party that includes many war veterans—the Islamic Revolution Devotees Society (Jamiyat-i Isargaran-i Inqilab-i Islami). Five of his cabinet members served in the IRGC, and several others are veterans.

Such connections are not restricted to conservative political figures. Prominent reformists, including Mohsen Armin and other founders of the Mujahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization, served in the IRGC, as have the Solidarity Party's Ebrahim Asgharzadeh, investigative journalist Akbar Ganji, legislator Hamid-Reza Jalaipur, and dissident journalist Mohsen Sazegara.<sup>37</sup>

Money, a source of power and influence, is another factor that connects individuals. Iran's fairly large "underground economy," which consists of both legal and illegal activities, represents the "symbiotic relationship between the ruling theocratic oligarchs and their business supporters in the bazaar." Participants in this relationship include state-sponsored enterprises, the foundations described above, credit markets in the bazaar, the religious shrines, banklike entities and credit unions, and major clerics through their private finances.

The business connections and related wealth—some billion dollars—of Ayatollah Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani's family offer a good example.<sup>39</sup> Hashemi-Rafsanjani was born to a pistachio-farming family in the village of Bahraman; he became close to Ayatollah Khomeini while studying in Qom. After the revolution he served in the legislative and executive branches. One of

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Hashemi-Rafsanjani's sons now heads the Tehran subway project, worth two billion dollars, and another runs a horse farm in a wealthy Tehran neighborhood. A

cousin is managing director of the Rafsanjan Pistachio Growers Cooperative, and an older brother once ran the country's largest copper mine. Mohsen Rafiqdust, head formerly of the Oppressed and Disabled Foundation and currently of the Noor Foundation, is related to Hashemi-Rafsanjani by marriage. The family also runs an airline and is involved in auto making.

The *aqazadeh* phenomenon represents the nexus of networks based on kinship and wealth. An *aqazadeh* is one "born to" (*-zadeh*) a cleric (*aqa*), and in Iran it is a colloquialism for officials' family members. These individuals take advantage of their family connections to conduct speculative business ventures. According to the judge in a high-profile corruption case in 2002, the Iranian judiciary "had opened an investigation into the illegal activities of the progenies and relatives of certain officials" in February 2000; the head of the State Audit

Office said in 2002 that the courts were investigating more than sixty cases involving the agazadehs. 40 He added, "These individuals took advantage of their fathers' status to commit some transgressions."

Possibly because of their high-level connections and access to money, some individuals implicated in corruption cases emerge relatively unscathed. In one case, an accomplice of Morteza Rafiqdust (brother of Mohsen Rafiqdust), Fazel Khodadad, was found guilty of misappropriating several billion rials and executed while Rafiqdust escaped with a life sentence. A parliamentary investigation in 2001 found that Rafiqdust was being allowed to leave the prison. In another case, Nasser Vaez-Tabasi (son of Ayatollah Vaez-Tabasi) ran the Sarakhs Free Trade Zone until arrested in July 2001 for selling shares in a state-owned enterprise. 41 Immediately released on bail, he and his codefendants were acquitted in March 2003 on the grounds that they had been ignorant of the law. 42

The role of money and wealth in shaping Iranian networks brings this aspect of the discussion full circle and raises an important question. Is a network's focus the pursuit of wealth, the pursuit of power for its own sake, or the fulfillment of loftier goals? This might be a generational issue—that is, individuals with many years' experience in opposition to the monarchy may have one set of motivations, while much younger individuals, without the same formative background, seek nothing more than self-enrichment and instant gratification. Individuals within a network could, therefore, have different motivations for working together. Falling between these two extremes are the now-middle-aged Iranians whose formative experience was the Iran-Iraq War. Those whom that experience led to appreciate military discipline and order have come to reject the inefficiency and mismanagement of existing state institutions and to yearn for the cohesiveness and unity that existed during the war. They want Iran to have a sound economy, to be a regional, if not global, leader.

### IRAN'S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS

The Iranian desire for a nuclear capability is not a recent development. The shah signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with the United States in 1957; he sent students overseas for training, and advisers from the United States, United Kingdom, and India came to Iran. 43 The civilian and military programs were shelved after the 1979 revolution, but the civilian program had been revived by 1984 and the military program by 1987.44

Tehran currently makes no secret of its pursuit of a nuclear capability, but it denies that it seeks nuclear weapons. Washington believes otherwise. 45 According to the Central Intelligence Agency, Iran has a clandestine nuclear weapons program. The Defense Intelligence Agency's director declared in early 2005 that Iran is devoting "significant resources to its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs." He predicted, "Tehran probably will have the ability to produce nuclear weapons early in the next decade."

These concerns are not peculiar to the United States. Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, as well as independent Russian experts, has voiced suspicions about the Iranian nuclear program. Indeed, growing skepticism in Moscow may explain Russian foot-dragging in completion of the nuclear facility in Bushehr. Israel too worries about Iranian pursuits. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon reportedly told President George W. Bush in April 2005 that Iran is nearing "a point of no return" in learning how to develop a nuclear weapon. In the suspicions of the suspicions of the nuclear states of the suspicions of the nuclear states of the suspicions of the nuclear facility in Bushehr. Israel too worries about Iranian pursuits. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon reportedly told President George W. Bush in April 2005 that Iran is nearing "a point of no return" in learning how to develop a nuclear weapon.

There are many reasons why Iran would want such a capability. Nuclear weapons would make Iran the dominant regional military power, thereby fulfilling what it sees as its destiny. Some of Iran's neighbors—India, Israel, Pakistan, and Russia—already have nuclear weapons, and Iran may want the same capability for reasons of prestige and of deterrence. International isolation during the Iran-Iraq War taught Iranian leaders the value of self-sufficiency, a factor they often cite when discussing their military industries. In fact, and as will be seen in some officials' statements below, lessons from the eight-year war may be the dominant factor in Iran's decision to pursue nuclear weapons.

#### Key Players in Iranian Nuclear Policy

The number of individuals who have an official role in national-security decision making is limited, and nuclear policy is probably restricted to an even smaller group. As one Western scholar notes:

Some scholars and observers of Iranian politics dismiss... evidence that Iran has embarked on a full-fledged nuclear weapons program. It is curious that they should have confidence in making such an assessment, given that the secretive regime in Tehran is not likely to publicly broadcast a decision to acquire nuclear weapons. Such a decision would be tightly held in a small circle of regime insiders.<sup>48</sup>

That "small circle" of decision makers, however, can be influenced from outside, because its members are actors within networks and the links between them. They are therefore susceptible to the public discussion of the nuclear issue. Initially, the Iranian press unquestioningly reported the government's antinuclear stance and spoke out against "outside scrutiny of and meddling in what was deemed as Iran's peaceful nuclear energy program." After Pakistan tested a nuclear weapon in late 1998, Iranians began to demand a similar capability. But the debate that appeared was more about policy options—to have or not to have—than about the possible existence of a nuclear weapons program. 50

Discussion of the issue had evolved by 2004 in light of the international community's increasing concern over possible Iranian nuclear ambitions. Debate on

nuclear options in the overall context of the country's foreign policy became "more widespread and transparent," there was consideration of the costs and benefits of a weapons program, and after President Bush consigned Iran to the "axis of evil" in his 2002 State of the Union Address the nuclear option was viewed as a deterrent or a bargaining tool.<sup>51</sup> Iranian commentary has generally

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been against developing a weapons capability, because this would have a negative impact on Iran's relations with its immediate neighbors, possibly lead to inter-

national sanctions, and serve as a pretext for greater U.S. involvement in the region.<sup>52</sup> Consideration now is given to whether Iran should leave the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or adhere to the Additional Protocol of the NPT.

Formally and constitutionally, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is at the top of the foreign-policy and national-security structure, and he makes the final decisions. He is tasked with supervising the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government (Article 57 of the constitution). His duties include making general policy for the country, in consultation with the Expediency Council, and supervising its execution (Article 110). Personnel appointments made by the Supreme Leader that affect security issues include the chief of the joint staff, the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, and the supreme commanders of the conventional armed forces. He also has the power to mobilize or assume command of the armed forces and to declare war and peace. A 1989 revision of Article 110 allows the Supreme Leader to delegate duties and powers to another person.

Khamenei was appointed Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic in June 1989 after the death of its founder, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Born in Mashhad in 1939, Khamenei pursued religious studies briefly in Najaf before relocating in 1958 to Qom, where he studied with Khomeini and Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Tabatabai Borujerdi, the source of emulation at the time. He was arrested several times in the 1960s and 1970s for his antiregime activities. Khamenei was appointed the Tehran Friday Prayer leader in 1980 and was elected to the legislature in the same year. He served as president, an elected position that is subordinate to the unelected supreme leader, from 1981 to 1989.

Today Khamenei is a vocal advocate of Iran's right to a nuclear capability, but he also proclaims opposition to nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. Nuclear know-how, Khamenei said in March 2003, is different from a nuclear bomb: 53 "We are not interested in an atomic bomb. We are opposed to chemical weapons. . . . These things are against our principles." He said in October 2003, "We have repeatedly declared that we do not need nuclear weapons, because we never believe that the possession of such weapons would provide the ground for the country's strength and authority."<sup>54</sup>

Khamenei reportedly has issued a religious decree, or *fatwa*, against nuclear weapons. "We believe that the use of nuclear weapons is religiously forbidden," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said in September 2004;<sup>55</sup> "this is the leader's *fatwa*." A Supreme National Security Council official has explained, "The religious verdict of our leader is that using weapons of mass destruction is forbidden, is *haram* ['unlawful' in Islam]. . . . For Iranians, this verdict is much more important than the NPT." Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations has used the same terminology. He has referred to "serious ideological restrictions against weapons of mass destruction, including a religious decree issued by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, prohibiting the development and use of nuclear weapons." "57

Regardless of such disavowals, Iran appears to be pursuing a nuclear weapons capability, and its dedication of the resources necessary for such an effort indicates that Khamenei has given it his stamp of approval. It was during Khamenei's presidency that the civilian and military aspects of the nuclear program were revived, and given his closeness with Ayatollah Khomeini at the time and his status as commander in chief of the armed forces, it is extremely unlikely that he was ignorant of this program. In light of Khamenei's extensive system of Supreme Leader's Representatives, it is similarly unlikely that he would not be aware of an ongoing weapons program now.

The thirty-eight-member Expediency Council, which does not have a formal national security function, considers issues submitted to it by the Supreme Leader, and the Supreme Leader appoints all its members (Article 112).<sup>58</sup> Ex officio members of this body are the president, speaker of parliament, judiciary chief, and the six clerical members of the Guardians Council. The Expediency Council adjudicates when the Guardians Council and the parliament cannot resolve their differences over legislation. Former president Ayatollah Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani is the chairman of this body, and former IRGC commander Mohsen Rezai is its secretary.

Hashemi-Rafsanjani, who is seventy years old, has served in most of the Islamic Republic's top jobs. He was the parliamentary speaker and then the president (1989–97), and aside from the chairmanship of the Expediency Council, he is deputy head of the Assembly of Experts. He is disparaged as a political opportunist, but his every move is watched closely—witness the hostile and vociferous reformist reaction to his run for parliament in 2001 and the political discourse regarding the possibility of his running for president in 2005. Networks connected with Hashemi-Rafsanjani are based on his family and its financial holdings, his professional positions, and his connection with two technocratic

political groups—the Executives of Construction Party and the Moderation and Development Party. He is not an advocate of conducting foreign policy openly: he was closely involved with the arms-for-hostages deal of the mid-1980s, and in spring 2002 there were reports that he dispatched a relative or Expediency Council colleagues to Cyprus to negotiate with the United States.<sup>59</sup>

Hashemi-Rafsanjani's public stand on the nuclear issue has evolved with time. In 1988, when he was speaker of parliament, he described chemical and biological weapons as easily produced "poor man's atomic bombs."60 "We should at least consider them for our defense," he continued. "Although the use of such weapons is inhuman, the war taught us that international laws are only scraps of paper." After becoming president, Hashemi-Rafsanjani was even less guarded. He asserted that the experience of the war showed the potential of WMD and further that Iran had learned that when war gets to a certain stage the international community ignores violations of international law.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, he declared, "We should fully equip ourselves in the defensive and offensive use of chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons."

Hashemi-Rafsanjani's more recent public comments on nuclear issues mirror those of the Supreme Leader and other conservative officials. He criticizes what he sees as an American bias against Iran and claims that Iran has the right to exploit domestically developed technological knowledge. However, he made a rather controversial statement in a December 2001 sermon: "If one day this Islamic world is also equipped with weapons like those that Israel possesses now, then the imperialists' strategy will reach a standstill because the use of even one nuclear bomb inside Israel will destroy everything."62 "However, it will only harm the Islamic world," he added.

The country's top foreign policy body is the Supreme National Security Council (Article 176 of the constitution). It determines national security and defense policy within the framework of the general policies specified by the Supreme Leader, and it coordinates all activities related to national security. The president (currently Mahmud Ahmadinejad; Hojatoleslam Mohammad Khatami from 1997-2005) chairs the Security Council; Hojatoleslam Hassan Fereidun Rohani was its secretary from 1989 to 2005; and the current secretary is Ali Ardeshir-Larijani. Its other members are the speaker of parliament, the judiciary chief, the chief of the armed forces' Supreme Command Council, the officer in charge of planning and budget, two representatives of the Supreme Leader, the top officers from the regular armed forces and the IRGC, and the heads of the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Intelligence and Security, and Interior Ministry. The Supreme Leader must confirm Security Council decisions before they can be implemented.

The Iranian Security Council took the lead on the nuclear issue in September 2003, according to Rohani. Until then the council had not been involved, because "Iranian authorities said the country's nuclear programs were purely peaceful and they were not a cause of any concern." The "emergency conditions" that arose in September 2003 necessitated the council's involvement; Rohani did not explain what he meant by "emergency conditions," but he was probably referring to the 12 September 2003 IAEA Board of Governors resolution urging Iran to accelerate its cooperation with the agency and calling on Tehran to "remedy all failures identified by the agency." The resolution called for unrestricted access to all locations and provision of complete answers to any questions posed by inspectors and of all information required to resolve outstanding issues.

Rohani, a former vice president and five-term legislator who was born in Semnan in 1948, also serves on the Expediency Council. A conservative figure and member of the Tehran Militant Clergy Association, he is identified with Hashemi-Rafsanjani and does not appear to have an independent political base. His role on the Security Council situated Rohani where he can wield significant influence in terms of diplomacy, policy, and public outreach. When the foreign ministers of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom visited Tehran in October 2003 in an attempt to encourage Iran to address the international community's concerns about its nuclear activities, it was Rohani with whom they met. Subsequently, Rohani had to defend the agreement he reached with the Europeans in a meeting with Tehran Province Friday Prayer leaders. 65

Rohani has been quick to note he is not the sole decision maker in this area, that "a group of high-ranking officials make the final decision." Indeed, a committee consisting of Rohani, Minister of Intelligence and Security Hojatoleslam Ali Yunesi, Minister of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics Ali Shamkhani, Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, and Supreme Leader's Representative Ali-Akbar Velayati met in October 2003 to discuss Iran's reaction to the IAEA resolution within the context of the international climate. 67

The most important decisions continued to be made by the Council of Heads—for example, whether or not to negotiate with the European Union or cooperate with the IAEA. "In fact, all of the important and strategic principles and decisions that were the foundation of work were ratified in the Council of Heads," Rohani said. 68 "The decisions that were made on the second level, which means in the Committee of Ministers, were also reported to the leader and the president before being executed." Every committee agreed, Rohani said, that the complete nuclear fuel cycle is Iran's "red line." In other words, Iran might be willing to suspend some of its nuclear activities temporarily, but it would never forsake mastery of the fuel cycle—uranium extraction and enrichment; fuel

production; loading the reactor with fuel; and then unloading, reprocessing, and storing the spent fuel.

Ali Ardeshir-Larijani succeeded Rohani as secretary of the Security Council in August 2005. Prior to his appointment, Larijani served as the Supreme Leader's Representative to the Security Council. Larijani dismissed Iran's November 2004 agreement with the European Union's "Big Three"—France, Germany, and the United Kingdom—voluntarily to "continue and extend its suspension to include all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities." In his view, Iran had made concessions in exchange for nothing tangible, effectively exchanging a "pearl" for a "bonbon." Uranium enrichment, he argued, should not be halted without securing economic concessions—the European promise of assistance in gaining World Trade Organization membership, furthermore, was a one-time deal, whereas suspending uranium enrichment was an ongoing commitment.

Hojatoleslam Mohammad Khatami, former chairman of the Supreme National Security Council, was elected president of Iran in May 1997 and reelected in June 2001. Born in Yazd Province to a clerical family in 1943, he began his religious studies in Qom in 1961. He also earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy at Isfahan University. Khatami served as a legislator from 1980 to 1981 and as the Islamic Culture and Guidance Minister from 1981 to 1982 and again from 1989 to 1992. From 1980 to 1988 he chaired the War Propaganda Headquarters. He headed the national library from 1992 to 1997, during which years he was also an adviser to President Hashemi-Rafsanjani. His younger brother, Mohammad Reza Khatami (born 1959), was deputy speaker of the sixth parliament (2000–2004); another brother, Ali Khatami (born 1953), heads the presidential office.

Khatami is closely involved with Iran's aggressive pursuit of a nuclear capability. Shortly after his election he created the Supreme Council for Technology, in order to complete the nuclear reactor at Bushehr as well as other activities needed to master the nuclear fuel cycle. <sup>70</sup> Khatami also took steps to ensure that an adequate budget was available. Khatami reportedly wanted Iran to have access to nuclear energy "for peaceful purposes," including the production of electricity.

As Iran's president at a time when the nuclear issue has been an increasingly public issue, Khatami has frequently defended what he sees as the country's right to exploit the complete nuclear fuel cycle. He also defended the Iranian position in talks with foreign leaders during his travels in Europe. Khatami always denied that Iran is interested in weaponization, but as the president he was almost certainly aware that his protestations were untrue. There is a remote possibility that he was not aware of how extensive the nuclear weapons program is; Khatami's relations with the leaders of the IRGC, which allegedly handles clandestine aspects of the Iranian nuclear program, are poor.<sup>71</sup>

Mahmud Ahmadinejad—born in 1956 or 1957 in Garmsar, a city near Tehran—succeeded Khatami in August 2005. The Iranian government made efforts beforehand to show that nuclear policy would not change, publicizing a meeting of the newcomer Ahmadinejad with his predecessors—Khamenei, Hashemi-Rafsanjani, Khatami, and former prime minister Mir-Hussein Musavi. Nevertheless, there were organizational and personnel changes in the Security Council. In addition to Rohani's replacement, former diplomat Javad Vaidi succeeded Hussein Musavian as head of the foreign policy committee, and Ali-Asqar Soltanieh, who once represented Iran at the IAEA, succeeded Cyrus Nasseri on the negotiating team.

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps arose from distrust of the regular officer corps after Iran's 1979 revolution; a Revolutionary Guards Ministry existed from 1982 until 1989. That means that in parallel to the regular ground forces, navy, and air force, there exist IRGC ground, naval, and air forces. Furthermore, the two institutions have different functions. According to the constitution, the regular military must guard the country's independence and territorial integrity (Article 143), whereas the IRGC is tasked with protecting the revolution and its achievements (Article 150). On the basis of this praetorian function, and also through less formal ties, IRGC officers wield considerable influence in policy issues. According to one study, the corps "routinely exploits its access to the Supreme Leader's office, volunteers advice on national and foreign policy matters to the Leader and his key staff, and actively aims to influence policy and debate on security issues." The IRGC also exploits its links with conservative clerics and uses Friday Prayers to influence the policy debate.

The head of the IRGC from 1981 to 1997 was Mohsen Rezai, who now serves as secretary of the Expediency Council and was a hard-line candidate in the 2005 presidential election until dropping out of the race. Rezai has repeatedly objected to the course of Iran-EU nuclear negotiations, criticizing Iranian diplomats and Hassan Rohani. The current head of the IRGC is General Yahya Rahim-Safavi, who was Rezai's deputy. Rahim-Safavi is fairly discreet on the nuclear issue; he said in October 2004, "It is better if military personnel don't express their views on Iran's nuclear file."

The deputy commander of the IRGC, General Mohammad Baqer Zolqadr, has nonetheless commented on the nuclear issue, although his statements have dealt more with military issues than with state policy. In July 2003 Zolqadr recommended caution before signing the Additional Protocol of the NPT, because it could make Iran vulnerable to foreign intelligence services; a year later he defended Iran's development of nuclear technology as a requirement for progress. The next month, in August 2004, Zolqadr emphasized that Iran has a right to develop and use nuclear technology. <sup>79</sup> Zolqadr has declared that Iran would

retaliate against Israel were it to be attacked: "If a missile is fired at the Bushehr power plant, Israel must say goodbye forever to the Dimona nuclear center which is the place where nuclear weapons are produced and kept in that country." He revisited this theme in November 2004: "In case of an attack against our nuclear installations, there will be no restraint in jeopardizing the interests of the invading country in any corner of the world."80

In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the major figures with respect to nuclear issues are the foreign minister, Manuchehr Mottaki, who succeeded Kamal Kharrazi in August 2005; Mohammad Javad Zarif-Khonsari, Iran's permanent representative at the United Nations in New York; and Piruz Husseini, Iran's permanent representative to the IAEA. Nonetheless, the ministry appears to play a minor part in nuclear decision making, although its diplomatic function is important in reassuring other countries. One Western journalist ascribes an Iranian diplomat's "patently absurd explanations for Iran's undisclosed nuclear facilities" to the possibility that he "may have been kept in the dark about the nuclear program, and then did his best to brazen it out."81 International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors have said that Foreign Ministry officials were frequently as amazed as they were by what the IAEA discovered.82

A former Iranian ambassador to the IAEA has recalled that initially it was unclear who would have the last word on the nuclear issue, because top officials all had "equal footing" and because of excessive secrecy. 83 The ambassador tried to break through the impasse by leaking information to the press; he was relieved of his duties in late 2003. It was a time when the international community's concern about Iranian nuclear activities was rising; Foreign Minister Kharrazi asked that the Supreme National Security Council take responsibility for the nuclear issue.84

Iran's Atomic Energy Organization is headed by Qolam Reza Aqazadeh-Khoi, Vice President for Atomic Energy (succeeding Reza Amrollahi). By bragging, bluffing, and exaggerating, he has tried to portray himself as the "father" of the Iranian nuclear program.<sup>85</sup> In fact, there is no such individual, least of all Aqazadeh-Khoi. He has not had a significant role in Iran's nuclear negotiations with the European Union, in contrast with officials from the Supreme National Security Council, which alone indicates that he is not a significant player.

# Other Foreign-Policy Stakeholders

These individuals and agencies do not operate in a vacuum. In addition to those we have mentioned, a number of other official bodies are stakeholders in the foreignpolicy process by virtue of the complex system of checks and balances delineated by the Iranian constitution.

The Assembly of Experts, an elected body of eighty-six clerics, selects and supervises the Supreme Leader. Its biannual meetings are held behind closed doors, but the official statements from the assembly's opening and closing sessions reveal an increasing interest in foreign affairs. Ayatollah Ali-Akbar Meshkini-Qomi is the speaker of the Assembly of Experts, and his deputy is Ayatollah Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani.

The Guardians Council vets all legislation for compatibility with Islamic law and the constitution (Article 91). <sup>86</sup> This twelve-member body consists of six clerics (appointed by the Supreme Leader) and six lawyers (approved by the legislature from a list submitted by the head of the judiciary). Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati heads this body; the other clerical members are Ayatollah Mohammad Daneshzadeh-Momen-Qomi, Hojatoleslam Sadeq Ardeshir-Larijani, Ayatollah Qolam Reza Rezvani, Ayatollah Mohammad Hassan Qaderi, and Hojatoleslam Mohammad-Reza Mudarissi-Yazdi.

The Guardians Council secretary, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, is also a member of the Expediency Council and Assembly of Experts, the Supreme Leader's Representative for Bosnia Affairs, and the Supreme Leader's Representative to the relief headquarters for Kosovar Muslims. He also has provided the hard-line Ansar-i Hizbullah vigilante group with theological justifications for killing.<sup>87</sup> In late 2003 he advocated withdrawal from the NPT: "What is wrong with reconsidering this treaty on nuclear energy and pulling out of it? North Korea pulled out of it and many countries have never even entered it. It would have been much better if we had not entered it at all. But now that we have entered, we are free to reconsider. Why should we not reconsider this?"88 Conceding that the final decision rests with the Supreme Leader, Jannati nonetheless argued, "The Additional Protocol would impose an extraordinary humiliation on us and we should not accept it under any circumstances."89 He later expressed unhappiness over the decision to suspend uranium enrichment: "Of course, I felt very bitter when I heard that all [nuclear] activities have been postponed. This was as bitter as poison to me."90

The 290-member Iranian parliament's role in determining nuclear policy relates to its responsibility to approve all international treaties, protocols, contracts, and agreements (Article 77). Moreover, the president or a cabinet member must respond when at least a quarter of the legislature poses a question on any issue (Article 88). The current speaker is Tehran representative Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel; deputy speakers are Tehran representative Mohammad Reza Bahonar and Qazvin representative Mohammad Hassan Abutorabi-Fard. At first glance, the parliament appears to be little more than a rubber stamp. For example, when British, French, and German foreign ministers visited Tehran in October 2003, the two sides announced that Tehran "has decided to sign the

IAEA Additional Protocol and commence ratification procedures [and] will continue to cooperate with the [IAEA] in accordance with the protocol in advance of its ratification." By law, the legislature had to approve the signing of the protocol; asked if such approval would be forthcoming, the government spokesman said that all the negotiations related to the Additional Protocol were "in line with the views and approval of" Supreme Leader Khamenei. 91 He continued, "Given the fact that what has been accomplished so far has been approved by the highest authority in the land, it is not likely to face any difficulty."

Yet there have been voices of dissent in the legislature. Isfahan parliamentary representative Ahmad Shirzad has warned that "contrary to its claims, the regime is secretly preparing to produce weapons of mass destruction."92 Shirzad has also charged that the regime did not believe that its activities would be discovered and that the appearance that Iran had covered up its nuclear activities during the last eighteen years undermined Iran's position as a peaceful member of the international community.<sup>93</sup> (The speaker of parliament and other legislators condemned Shirzad, and a demonstration against him took place in Isfahan.)94

The current legislature, convened in June 2004, supports Iran's development of a nuclear capacity and in some cases has questioned and criticized officials for making concessions on this issue. When Tehran and the European Union agreed that Iran would voluntarily "continue and extend its suspension to include all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities," the legislature summoned Supreme National Security Council secretary Hojatoleslam Hassan Rohani. After the meeting Rohani told reporters that the Iran-EU agreement was a preliminary document that will determine future activities and so did not need parliamentary approval, but that "once long-term agreements are finalized, they will have to be ratified by the parliament." Even that statement did not satisfy the parliamentarians, and Rohani had to return for another closeddoor session.95

General legislative dissatisfaction persists with the international community's stand on the nuclear issue. Speaker Gholamali Haddad-Adel has said that the parliament demands access to nuclear technology; <sup>96</sup> his deputy has asserted that the legislature "does not regard as positive the strict policies pursued by the European states in the recent draft resolution issued by the [IAEA] Board of Governors and interprets it as a reflection of the U.S. political attitude towards Iran's nuclear program."97 In November 2004, legislators drafted a bill banning the production of nuclear weapons. One of them explained, "Since the officials of the Islamic republic have always stressed that Iran is not after nuclear weapons, legislators want to legalize the banning of access to nuclear weapons with their bill and at the same time show Iran's goodwill to the world."98 At least one parliamentarian opposed this measure on the ground that Iran is in a region of proliferators: "Our enemies today have armed themselves with all kinds of weapons. What is wrong for a country to have deterrent weapons and—even though it does not need them—to use them as a deterrent to scare the enemy and prevent it from attacking?"

In addition to agencies and officials having direct or collateral involvement with nuclear policy, prominent individuals have expressed strong opinions on the issue. The system of networks enables these figures to influence the debate. One influential actor is Mohammad Javad Ardeshir-Larijani, Ali Larijani's brother, born in Najaf, Iraq, in 1950. He is the judiciary chief's foreign affairs adviser, an Expediency Council member, and head of the Center for Research on Theoretical Physics. In August 2004 he asserted that prior to Iran's taking on any commitments, the West should build for it four nuclear reactors. Larijani recommended leaving the NPT if pressure on Iran increased. A month later, he said Iran has the right to acquire a nuclear weapon: "From a defensive point of view it makes no sense for our enemy to have nuclear weapons while we deprive ourselves of these weapons. . . . We have a certain and indisputable right to possess nuclear weapons. . . . Israel possesses nuclear weapons, and because of this, no one has the right to deprive us of the possession of these weapons."

Hussein Shariatmadari, the Supreme Leader's Representative to the Kayhan Institute and the managing director of the newspaper *Kayhan*, served with the IRGC in the early 1980s. He has regularly called for Iran to withdraw from its international nuclear obligations and denounced related agreements. "The final solution is surely withdrawal from the NPT," he wrote in 2004, but before that Iran had to renounce the October 2003 agreement with the EU. <sup>102</sup> He wrote of Iran's November 2004 agreement with the EU to suspend temporarily uranium enrichment, "What appears to be emanating from the whole affair is the stench of giving in to illegal, illegitimate and excessive demands made by the European Union (EU) troika (read the U.S. and its allies)." Two months later he declared that Iran must resume uranium enrichment in order to gain concessions from other countries.

Finally there should be mentioned Ali-Akbar Velayati, the Supreme Leader's international affairs adviser, a member of the Expediency Council, and foreign minister from 1981 to 1997. He was a member of the committee that met in October 2003 to determine Iran's future relationship with the IAEA. He has since declared support for Iranian negotiating tactics and advocated continued cooperation with the IAEA. However, he advocates an ability to exploit nuclear energy, as a means of guaranteeing the country's independence when it runs out of oil. 106

Aside from these individuals, it is asserted, there seems to be a "sacred cow" within the nuclear constituency of Iran. The former manager of the Bushehr nuclear facility has charged that the legislature and the head of the Atomic Energy Organization know the facility consumes too much money and is not economical but that the government insists on completing it for reasons of prestige. 107 "This project has become something on which our prestige depends, and the officials intend to finish it no matter what the conditions are in which that might happen." The former manager holds that for this reason, budgeting for the project is growing without any accurate evaluation of progress. He observed that high-ranking officials at Bushehr receive very high salaries, implying that nepotism is involved in such appointments.

Pragmatism and such issues as economics and geopolitics have surpassed ideology and nationalism as the main determinants of Iranian foreign policy in the quarter century since the Islamic revolution. Nevertheless, leading officials' statements make it clear that ideology continues to be a factor. There is a continuing emphasis on "third worldism," and nationalism is associated with the nuclear debate as well. The role of these factors in any policy debate is unpredictable—as a result in part of the theocratic system's traditional emphasis on secrecy, dissimulation, and expediency. This uncertainty goes some way toward explaining the seeming irrationality of the Iranian government's actions.

This article has sought to cut through this obscurity by means of the quasiofficial networks that influence the policy debate in Iran, and the factors that hold such networks together—religious status and education, political affiliation, kinship, military service, and wealth. One social-network analysis that used the Iranian government as a case study has found "social closeness" and "secondary group membership" more important than straightforward administrative connections. 108 Such research is not an exact science, however; for example, the authors of that case study warned that its weighting of individuals' and groups' influence was questionable because its source of data was an opposition organization.

We have, however, gone somewhat beyond the discipline of network analysis, by addressing certain prominent individuals who have taken stances on the nuclear issue. These are individuals upon whom outsiders can focus when trying to influence nuclear decision making in Iran.

What is more difficult is identifying the lower-level individuals who could serve as links to these figures. In general, gaining access to the networks and individuals discussed here is not easy for outsiders to the system—not least because accusations of contacts with Americans have been used as ammunition in the country's political squabbles. However, Iran's nuclear ambitions are sufficiently worrisome and potentially dangerous to justify the investment of time, effort, and other resources that the attempt would require.

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